

Cottage Prevention Meeting

How Parents Can Prevent Drug Abuse

Research shows that the main reason that kids don't use alcohol, tobacco, or drugs is because of their parents -- because of their positive influence and because they know it would disappoint them. That's why it is so important that parents build a strong relationship with their kids and talk to them about substance abuse -- the earlier the better!

The good news is it's easy to do! Here are a few ways you can build a positive relationship with your kids and start talking to them about drugs.

Note: "Drugs" refers to alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs.

Establish and maintain good communication with your children.

Why? The better you know your children, the easier it will be to guide them towards positive activities and friendships.

How?

- Talk to your children every day. Share what happened to you and ask what happened to them during the day.
- Ask questions that kids can't answer with "yes" or "no," such as "what was your favorite part of the day." Ask your children their opinions and include them in making decisions. Show your children that you value their thoughts and input.
- Be ready to talk to your children as early as the fourth grade, when they may first feel peer pressure to experiment with alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes
- Listen to your child's or teen's concerns nonjudgmentally. Repeat them to make clear that you understand. Don't preach.

Get involved in your children's lives.

Young people are less likely to get involved with drugs when caring adults are a part of their life.

- Spend time doing something your children want to do every day.
- Support your children's activities by attending special events, like recitals and games, and praising them for their efforts.
- Help your children manage problems by asking what is wrong when they seem upset and letting them know you are there to help.

Make clear rules and enforce them consistently.

Why? Research shows that when parents set harsh rules or no rules, kids are more likely to try drugs.

How?

- Discuss rules, expectations, and consequences in advance.
- If a rule is broken, be sure to enforce the consequences. This teaches children to take responsibility for their actions.
- Give praise when your children follow rules and meet expectations.

Be a positive role model.

Why? Children imitate adults.

How?

- Demonstrate ways to solve problems, have fun, and manage stress without using alcohol or drugs.
- Point out examples of irresponsible behavior, such as ones you see in movies or hear in music.
- Remember that you set the example. Avoid contradictions between your words and your actions. Use alcohol in moderation, don't smoke cigarettes, and never use drugs.

Help your children choose friends wisely.

Why? When children have friends who don't engage in risky behaviors, they are likely to resist them too.

How?

- Help your kids feel comfortable in social situations.
- Get to know your children's friends and their families.
- Involve your children in positive group activities, such as sports teams, scouting troops, and after school programs.

Talk to your children about drugs.

Why? When parents talk to their kids early and often about substance abuse, kids are less likely to try drugs.

How?

- Short discussions go a long way. Engage your children in a conversation. Ask what they know, how they feel, and what they think about the issue.
- Talk to your children one-on-one and together.
- Educate yourself about alcohol, tobacco, and drug use before talking to your children. You will lose credibility if you don't have your facts right.
- Set some time aside for you and your child to act out scenarios in which one person tries to pressure another to drink alcohol, smoke, or use a drug. Figure out two or three ways to handle each situation and talk about which works best.

When?

- Any time you spend together is the perfect time for a conversation.
- Establish an ongoing conversation rather than giving a one-time speech.

What should I say?

- Explain the effects of drugs on the body and the legal consequences of using drugs.
- Make it clear that you don't want your kids to use drugs and that you will be disappointed if they do.
- Discuss why using drugs isn't okay. Explain that it's against the law for a child or teen to use alcohol or cigarettes and that using drugs is always illegal—for good reason.
- Explain how drug use can hurt people in several ways—for example, the transmission of AIDS through shared needles, slowed growth, impaired coordination, accidents.
- Discuss the legal issues. A conviction for a drug offense can lead to time in prison or cost someone a job, driver's license, or college loan.
- If any of your children have tried drugs, be honest about your disappointment, but emphasize that you still love them.